

Commissioning
USS JOHN HANCOCK
Pascagoula, Mississippi
10 March 1979

Captain Wilgenbush, officers and men of the JOHN HANCOCK, platform guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Mrs. Turner and I are really delighted to be back in Pascagoula and to be able to participate in another ceremony in the life of JOHN HANCOCK. It was just a little over sixteen months ago when Mrs. Turner shattered a ceremonial champagne bottle on the stem of this ship and christened her JOHN HANCOCK. That act gave this ship identity. It changed it from being a piece of iron to a hull with a name. In the months since then much has happened. The hull has been filled with propulsion engineering machinery, steering engines, a myriad of sensors, and weapons systems. And now, JOHN HANCOCK has moved toward that moment of life, that moment when we cease identifying this as a piece of iron, an inanimate object, and begin to recognize it as a living thing. You will soon witness a remarkable moment when the commission pennant will break above us here and the United States Ship JOHN HANCOCK will come into being.

For most you in the crew of JOHN HANCOCK, this will be the only time in your Navy life when you will be plank owners. This, in my view, is a great and a unique privilege for you. Not many men in the Navy have this opportunity and each of you will make your mark on this ship in a way that you never can in another circumstance. Whatever your

responsibilities will be on board JOHN HANCOCK, the effectiveness of your part of this ship when you depart some years hence will be due to your efforts and your efforts alone. You cannot blame your predecessor or the state in which he left things, you can only take the credit if you have done it well yourself.

Commissioning is a unique event then, unique for you, the members of this crew individually, because of the particular kind of responsibilities you will carry as plank owners. But it is unique also because I know of no other piece of military equipment which military men endow with life as they do a ship. And traditionally, they think of their ship as having a female being, we call our ship "she." We admire their feminine qualities, gracefulness, the beauty of their lines. And I recall the words of Admiral Nimitz. He said, "a ship is always referred to as a 'she' because it costs so much to keep her in paint and power." Long before Nimitz there was an old New England sailing ship captain who once said, "a ship is called a 'she' because there is always a gang of men around her, because she has a waist and stays, because it's not the initial expense that breaks you, it's the upkeep, because it takes a good man to handle her right, because she shows her topsides, hides her bottom and, when coming into port, always heads for the buoys."

Now I just read in the newspaper the other day that some Washington bureaucrat has decreed that ships are no longer to be referred to as "she." Apparently that is considered discriminatory. Now I do not know

whether that is discrimination against the women or against the men. But presumably this bureaucrat thinks we are going to try calling our ships "it." So I am here to tell you that any such bureaucrat efforts are bound to fail.

Navy men and women who go down to the sea in ships will always call them "she." Why? Because a ship with a commission pennant and a crew is a living being. The men and women who comprise the crew are bound to have emotion for their ship and one of those emotions must be care and tenderness. This ship will be useful to the United State of America only if you, the officers and men of JOHN HANCOCK, look after her with care and tenderness. Whether it is cleaning the bilges to prevent rust or tweaking the electronics to ensure maximum performance, this ship will only perform up to its capability if you give it the detail loving care and attention it demands. You have to love and nurture and care for her in the sense of adoring a woman if you are to get that instant perfect response from her that you may need on no notice.

Yet, on the other hand, it is not discriminatory because all of us who view JOHN HANCOCK as a "she" also view her as a man of war. JOHN HANCOCK will be an aggressive male fighter if ever called upon. That is the whole reason for her being and for your providing her the loving care that is necessary.

We must also remember that behind this ship are 203 years of courage, bravery and sacrifice of those sailors who went before us and served our nation in many a man of war. The courage, dedication, the loyalty which

it will take to do the same in this ship are both masculine and feminine. My charge therefore today to you, the officers, the men of JOHN HANCOCK, is first to treat this ship as feminine. To treat her as if you love her because how well she serves you will depend upon that. But second, to treat this ship as masculine. To be prepared to be men of war and to fight with vigor and the strength and resourcefulness such as has characterized the men who have gone before you in the ships of our great nation. For if our survival, as a country, depends upon it, you must be ready.

Captain Wilgenbush, I wish this ship and the sons and daughters of America who will serve in her, Godspeed. Thank you.

